

JAIME HERRERA BEUTLER
3RD DISTRICT, SOUTHWEST WASHINGTON

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May 7, 2020

Mr. Glenn Casamassa
Regional Forester, Pacific Northwest Region
U.S. Forest Service
1220 SW 3rd Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97204

Dear Regional Forester Casamassa:

I am writing to request that the U.S. Forest Service utilizes proper social distancing safeguards to quickly reopen and restore public access to the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area and Gifford Pinchot National Forest recreation areas.

Other federal agencies like the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are already reopening outdoor public access areas, meaning that citizens have already resumed visiting the Gorge for recreational purposes. Washington state opened several state-managed recreational areas on May 5. By providing local residents more options for recreation destinations, we'll be giving them more and potentially safer options if other sites are already "at capacity" under proper social distancing restrictions.

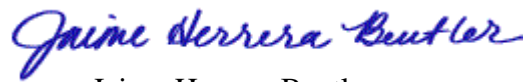
I have also pressed U.S. Fish and Wildlife to open National Wildlife Refuges without unnecessary delay, which would further disperse residents intent on visiting nature at a public access point in Southwest Washington.

At a congressional hearing on May 6 focused on COVID-19, I questioned public health experts well-versed in mental trauma and PTSD about the value of outdoor recreation in boosting emotional health and the safety of opening public lands for use during this pandemic. They strongly endorsed allowing public access to outdoor recreation, with the proper health guidelines in place.

I noted that the Forest Service has said it will conduct a review to reopen developed recreation sites by late May, but it's my hope and the desire of residents throughout this region that your agency has been planning for restored access to these popular sites and that they can be reopened without weeks of delay.

I appreciate your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jaime Herrera Beutler". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jaime Herrera Beutler
Member of Congress